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For Release June 1, 2005
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Highlands Council Issues Abstract Outlining Benefits for Highlands' Farmers

Chester, NJ- The Highlands Council released an abstract today, *Farming and the Highlands Act*, which outlines the Act's provisions for agricultural development in the Highlands Region.

The preservation of farmland and the promotion of agriculture in the Highlands Region are two essential objectives of the Highlands Act. The Legislature declares in the Highlands Act that the 110,000 acres of agricultural lands in active production in the Highlands Region are important resources of the State that should be preserved, and that the agricultural industry in the Highlands Region is a vital component of the Garden State.

"Farming is an important part of the economic and cultural landscape of the Highlands," said Council Chairman John Weingart. "The Legislature recognized this when they created exceptions for agriculture in the Act, and the Highlands Council recognizes this as we move forward in the planning process."

Foremost among the Highlands Act provisions addressing agriculture is the legislative directive that the Highlands Act not compromise the New Jersey Right to Farm Act. In addition, to further ensure that agriculture in the Highlands Region may continue to grow, the Highlands Act excludes agricultural use and agricultural development from regulation by the Department of Environmental Protection. Although agricultural development is excluded from regulation under the Highlands Act, any agricultural development projects in the Preservation Area which increase impervious cover by 3% or more are still subject to review by local soil conservation districts.

"We have been working closely with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture through Secretary Charles Kuperus and through our Interagency task force," added Council Chairman Weingart. "In addition, the New Jersey Farm Bureau has given multiple presentations to the Council, and we are currently working with them to set up a tour of Highlands farms for Council members and staff."

The Highlands Council's awareness of the importance of agriculture in the Highlands and the importance of the needs of farmers has lead the Council to create an Agriculture subcommittee, chaired by council member Kurt Alstede, who is himself a working farmer.

“The main reason that I am devoting so much time to the Highlands Council, and the reason I encouraged the creation of the Council’s Agriculture subcommittee is to make sure that the interests of farmers and businesses in the Highlands are protected,” said Council member Kurt Alstede.

Farming and the Highlands Act is the third in a series of abstracts being developed by the Highlands Council as part of its commitment to inform the public about the impact of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act on the region.

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